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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000653

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
PARIS FOR RWALLER
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
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DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN
OVP FOR HMUSTAFA

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TAGS: PGOV LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: ELECTION ANALYSIS: HOW DID THE LEBANESE VOTE?

REF: BEIRUT 634

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) A district-by-district analysis of the results of the June 7 parliamentary elections reveals that voters of all confessions voted mostly for full slates of candidates, rather than for individual candidates. Sunnis, Shia, and Druze voted solidly for their respective political blocs, and in fact decided the outcome in most of the Christian districts. The Shia voted overwhelmingly for Hezbollah and Nabih Berri's Amal Party and their Christian allies (FPM), while the Sunnis voted for Saad Hariri's Future Movement and its Christian allies (Kataeb and Lebanese Forces). The smaller Druze population followed the same pattern, supporting Walid Jumblatt and his allies. District results that differed substantially from pre-electoral polling may have come about because of a significant influx of expatriate voters.

¶2. (C) The Christians are still split in their loyalties. Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader Michel Aoun may have received a lower percentage of the Christian vote than he did in 2005, though he will have a significantly bigger parliamentary bloc (Ministry of Interior will release confessional voting information at a future date). Voters showed their distaste for "independent" candidates, even those specifically supported by the Maronite Patriarch and the President. Rumors of parties paying massive sums of money for votes, paying travel costs for expatriate voters, and other irregularities indicate that these tactics may also have had an effect on the final outcome, though information on this is only anecdotal. Aoun and defeated Zahle opposition leader Elie Skaff already have announced their intention to challenge the electoral results for two districts by taking their complaints to the newly formed Constitutional Council. End summary.

THEY VOTED THE LIST...
"AS IT IS"

¶3. (C) In the final weeks of the electoral campaign, Hariri's Future Movement and Aoun's FPM had competing billboards urging voters to vote their full lists "as they are," ("Zey ma hiye" on Future billboards, in Sidon slang, and "Mitl ma hiye" on FPM's, in the dialect of Mount Lebanon), without crossing off names or choosing a slate of individual candidates. The voters overwhelmingly followed this advice, as one side or the other swept every district except the Metn. (Note: Two other districts are "split," but by prior agreement: Beirut II's seats were agreed upon at the May 2008 Doha Conference, and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt left one seat open on his list in Aley for his March 8 rival, Talal Arslan. End note.) While it was expected that Muslim voters would vote full lists, the numbers indicate that Christians did as well, opting entirely for March 14's sovereignty, anti-Hizballah message (or for the traditional leaders allied with it) or Aoun's anti-corruption, need-for-change message (or for the General personally), regardless of who the candidates were.

¶4. (C) Sunnis, Shia, and Druze all voted as expected: March 14 swept Sunni- and Druze-majority districts and March 8 carried Shia-dominated areas. Majority-Christian districts with significant Shia populations were won by March 8 (Jbeil, Baabda), while those with Sunni voters went March 14, in defiance of pre-election polling numbers (Koura, Zahle). Zahle, where most pollsters expected seats to split between the two camps, was swept by March 14 on the back of a massive Sunni turnout which was double the Sunni vote in 2005. Many

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suspect these Sunni voters were expatriates who returned specifically to vote, and who were not present for pre-election polling.

MICHEL AOUN:
WINNER OR LOSER?

¶5. (C) Michel Aoun, who claimed to have won 70% of the Christian vote in 2005, did not fare as well this time. Though an official confessional breakdown of the voting statistics has not been released yet, March 14 sources claim he won the support of less than half of Christian voters, though that support is still 2.5 times the votes of the Kataeb and Lebanese Forces combined. Aoun's FPM took 20 seats compared to 15 in 2005, and his Change and Reform Bloc -- including the votes of Suleiman Frangieh's Marada Party, the Armenian Tashnaq party, and an independent in Baalbek, will have 27 seats, compared to 21 in 2005. Aoun's supporters are claiming their own "victory" because of this showing, even though he won fewer seats than they expected, and say it proves he is still the quintessential Christian leader in Lebanon.

¶6. (C) As noted above, Aoun won convincingly in districts with significant Shia populations. Of particular significance was his victory in Jbeil. With the help of Shia voters, Aoun defeated a list including former presidential advisor Nazem Khoury, in a development some see as a loss for President Sleiman. Although Sleiman made a last-minute behind the scenes effort to get voters to support his candidate, Khoury lost even in the President's hometown of Amchit.

¶7. (C) In districts without sizable Muslim populations, Aoun did reasonably well, but the race was close. Though pollsters had predicted Aoun could sweep the eight Metn seats, in the end, voters elected six of his candidates, but threw their support behind pro-March 14 independent Michel Murr and Kataeb's Sami Gemayel as well, likely because of their families' long history in both local and national politics. Also significantly, Aoun swept Keserwan, home of the Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir, who made

thinly-veiled attacks against Aoun on several occasions, including the day before the elections. Mansour Ilbon, an independent who headed the Keserwan list opposing Aoun, had launched his campaign from the Patriarch's home in Bkirke, so his loss was seen as a slap in the face for the religious leader, whose June 6 public comments may have backfired. Nonetheless, Aoun lost both Maronite seats in Batroun to March 14 candidates, despite the candidacy there of Aoun's son-in-law and current Telecom Minister Gebran Bassil. Bassil's loss was a big symbolic blow to Aoun and his party.

CORRUPTION:
PART OF LEBANESE DEMOCRACY

¶8. (C) Despite the Interior Ministry's smooth handling of the electoral process, there have been accusations of irregularities which FPM officials suggest might have changed the outcome of the elections, particularly in the Metn, where there are rumors of ballot boxes gone missing. While some say the Zahle vote suggests Hariri's Future Movement flew in voters, this is not technically against Lebanese law. Voter anecdotes of afternoon vote-buying as it became clear one side or the other was losing -- with prices reaching over \$5000 -- were widespread the day after elections. The average Lebanese shrugs at such antics, saying, "This is Lebanon." Despite the stories, most observers do not believe there will be many challenges to the results in the Constitutional Council, although Aoun announced in a June 10 televised speech (his first public appearance since the elections) that he planned to file complaints with the Council regarding two seats in Metn, followed by defeated

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opposition Zahle Christian leader Elie Skaff.

CONFESSİONAL POLITİCS RULE

¶9. (C) Thus far we have heard rhetoric from March 14 leaders that Nasrallah and Aoun's mistakes cost them the elections, and the Lebanese people chose March 14's message. Aoun supporters have highlighted their bloc's increase in seats and alleged that vote buying and irregularities on election day brought about the coalition's loss. In the end, our analysis is that voting along confessional and communal lines brought about the results. While Muslims voted en masse for their parties, Christians stuck to their traditional leaders, or in some cases, to local families. While there may have been a minority of Christians who voted based on ideology (the final official numbers on Christian voting will show this more clearly), the numbers indicate it was a small minority of the overall vote.

SISON